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INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHZU/ASIAN PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7213
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2975
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3226
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 1839
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 4189
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 5627
RUEHKS/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 2398
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 000076

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FOR EAP/J

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2019

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SUBJECT: JAPAN: AMBASSADOR,S FAREWELL MEETING WITH VFM
YABUNAKA

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Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a January 9 farewell meeting with the Ambassador, Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka thanked the Ambassador for his service and efforts to manage and strengthen bilateral ties during his tenure in Tokyo. Yabunaka told the Ambassador that, per his advice, he is talking to Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso about actively approaching the new U.S. Administration with policy ideas. He also reassured the Ambassador that Tokyo would continue to advance relations regardless of whether the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) or opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) heads the government. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Ambassador Schieffer called on VFM Yabunaka on January 9 to bid farewell before leaving post this week. Yabunaka thanked the Ambassador for his efforts toward strengthening U.S.-Japan ties and, specifically, for his work on U.S. base realignment plans in Okinawa and on the issue involving the North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens. He assured the Ambassador that bilateral ties remain strong and that Japan continues to look favorably upon the United States despite the global challenges facing Washington. Reflecting on his tenure, the Ambassador stressed that ties have never been closer. Japan has a place to play in world affairs, and both sides should continue to advance the relationship.

¶3. (C) On specific issues, the Ambassador characterized the abductions of Japanese citizens as a tragedy that is often misunderstood in the United States. The issue is &real8 and not simply a tool used by Japanese politicians to curry favor with the public. Talks with abductee family members, particularly the parents of Megumi Yokota, the most famous victim, and his trip to Niigata Prefecture, site of several kidnappings, were &heartbreaking,8 explained the Ambassador. &We can,t have people grabbing citizens of another country,8 he added. Yabunaka highlighted the importance of denuclearizing the North but saw abductions as violating &fundamental values.8

¶4. (C) Yabunaka thanked the Ambassador for guidance on ways to approach the next U.S. Administration. He mentioned that

he has held regular talks with PM Aso to discuss plans that will demonstrate to Washington Japan's cooperative and active stance toward the relationship. For example, Tokyo is considering additional measures for Afghanistan reconstruction beyond economic assistance. The VFM also highlighted Japan's strengths in areas such as climate change, disarmament, and aid to Africa.

15. (C) The Ambassador and Yabunaka agreed that alliance arrangements would remain strong throughout the transition in Washington and in spite of potential leadership changes in Japan. Yabunaka dismissed Japanese press reports that forecast potential U.S.-Japan policy differences on China and trumpeted real prospects for trilateral dialogue among the U.S., Japan, and China. Considering South Korean sensitivities, the Ambassador suggested a four-way dialogue that included Seoul. The Ambassador told the VFM that Tokyo would not lose its special place with Washington.

16. (C) Yabunaka mentioned that Tokyo looks forward to working with the new administration and with the Ambassador's successor. PM Aso is devoted to strengthening ties, and even the opposition DPJ values the relationship and will not let domestic politics erode Tokyo's commitment to the alliance. The DPJ will become more practical if it becomes the ruling party. Most of the major players in the DPJ, after all, originate from the LDP, added Yabunaka. He cautioned, however, that DPJ head Ichiro Ozawa has undergone a transformation from a former LDP member who regularly interacted with U.S. Embassy officers to a media shy leader who shuns contact. Yabunaka reminisced about his time as Consul General in Chicago when Ozawa visited a local Chicago grade school that taught Japanese language and was so impressed that he invited the students to Japan. Yabunaka now sees Ozawa as just strange.

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SCHIEFFER